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SUBJECT: ANTI-AMERICAN RHETORIC IN THE CANADIAN ELECTION:
NOTHING PERSONAL, BUT THERE IS A CAMPAIGN ON

Classified By: POLMINCOUNS Brian Flora, reasons 1.5 (b) (d)

1. (C/NF) Summary: As the themes in the ongoing campaign take shape it appears that the United States will be in the second tier, although this could change as this hotly contested race takes off and the parties scramble to gain traction. At present the primary themes are health and child care, the economy, taxation, and corruption; secondary issues are foreign policy, the environment, trade, and relations with the U.S. Each party will play the U.S. card differently. The Conservatives will take pains to dodge accusations of being in bed with the U.S. and selling out to its "unilateralist" foreign policy, while demonstrating that they could do a better job of getting Washington's attention on what matters to Canadians. The Liberals will emphasize their ability to stand up to the U.S., especially on softwood, without getting co-opted to compromise on important Canadian issues. The Bloc will be less likely to "harp" directly about the U.S. on anything, except where it facilitates Liberal-bashing. And the NDP will flog the issue of creeping Americanization -- in health care, foreign policy, and the pro-business environment -- suggesting it could do a better job than both Conservatives and Liberals of maintaining Canada's unique identity.

2. (C/NF) There will also be local issues that take prominence -- in Toronto, for example, U.S.-origin guns will be one of the key themes in urban ridings, and in Manitoba pollution from the Devils Lake outlet will undoubtedly be raised. And other issues will simply be worked into the day's events, such as the PM's comments about the U.S. not cooperating with the international community on climate change. The Ambassador was told by Ambassador McKenna that the race this time will be particularly nasty and that we should expect that the U.S. will be used as a political target of opportunity. But as our Canadian friends remind us constantly -- don't take it personal, it's just politics up north. End Summary

LIBERALS -- STANDING UP TO THE AMERICANS

3. (C) PM Martin has been caught between two competing demands with regard to relations with the U.S. On the one hand he won the leadership race in 2004 with the promise that he would improve bilateral relations after the rocky road Chretien had led Canada down. But knowing that Chretien was playing to a popular dislike for certain U.S. foreign and social policies, he opened the campaign with this defining statement: "we are different than the United States. We want to be different than the United States. We want to be Canada, and we are Canada and we're proud of it." These two themes -- we will guard the distinctiveness of Canada while maintaining good relations with our key trading partner, have provided the brackets of Liberal Party cross-border policy, at times a conflictive morass.

4. (C) A taste of the cross-border issues that could come up for the Liberals during the campaign were on display in the last Question Period before the House fell, a particularly spirited session. The Bloc accused the government of being in cahoots with the CIA and allowing planes with terrorist suspects to land in Canada on their way to Guantanamo. The NDP questioned how the government could allow the sale of a "piece of Canada to the U.S." because of the purchase of a Canadian company by the U.S. firm Kinder Morgan, while warning against the "creeping Americanization of health care." And the Conservatives carried on their week-long campaign to question the Liberal's ability to solve the softwood dispute on good terms for Canada.

5. (C) Standing up to the Americans will be the primary cross-border campaign theme for the Liberals, and has already come across three times. In the PM's first speech immediately following his notification of the Governor General that the government had lost the confidence of the House, he said that the Liberals would do a better job than anyone else in "standing up to the United States" on trade disputes, which he has repeated several times since. On December 7 the PM gave a press scrum to a domestic audience

following his climate change speech to an international audience. In the international speech he did not mention the U.S. by name, but when talking to Canadian voters he used the opportunity to say "to the reticent nations, including the U.S., I say there is such a thing as a global conscience, and now is the time to listen to it." And one of his five points to help control gun violence in Toronto was to add border guards who could stop the flow of guns from the United States. We can expect the theme of standing up to the Americans to be a persistent one in the Liberal campaign.

CONSERVATIVES -- DON'T STAND TOO CLOSE TO ME

16. (C) If the Liberals are schizophrenic in the campaign when it comes to relations with the U.S., the Conservatives are simply living a double life. Conservative MPs flock to the residence for functions and often are effusive in their praise for the President and First Lady; they are in awe at the thought of a conservative party having the kind of widespread support that the Republicans have in the U.S. From social policy, to foreign policy, we can find droves of true believers among the Conservatives who simply wish Canada were more like the U.S.

17. (C) But the Conservatives know that if they are to get elected, they cannot let this affinity for the U.S. show, and in fact must demonstrate real coolness for their cousins to the south. The issue nationally is winning seats in riding-rich Ontario, where they see real potential among economic conservatives, who are drawn to the small government, no corruption, low-taxation policies of the Conservatives, but might be nervous about certain social policies or a too "militaristic" foreign policy. To get to these voters the Conservatives will need to maintain a healthy distance from the U.S. This was a large part of the reason why, after supporting Canadian involvement in the missile defense program for years, they did an about face in the spring of 2005 and recommended further consideration.

18. (C) The Conservatives hope to convince voters that they will have better luck in managing relations with the U.S. because they will not engage in the constant criticism that has damaged the relationship under Liberal stewardship, but will not make Canada America's lap dog in the process. The litmus test for this for the past year has been Iraq, and Liberal politicians continue to tell Canadians that if the Conservatives had been in power there would likely be Canadian soldiers in Iraq today. The Conservatives must keep a very healthy distance from Iraq and the other aspects of the war on terror that Canadians find objectionable, while arguing that they will be able to take issues to Washington, such as softwood, and have them seriously considered.

LE BLOC QUEBECOIS -- SINGLE RANDOM ISSUES

19. (C) The Bloc will likely be the least strategic of the parties in how it uses the U.S. in the campaign. There is a real affection by Quebecers for America and its people, while true consternation for what is perceived as the unilateralism and militarism of the current U.S. administration. But any use of the United States by Bloc politicians will be intended to win votes, not lose friends, and will be aimed at the Liberal Party. As Bloc politicians have done in question period over the past six months there could be talk of the unfairness of the U.S. softwood position and of Canadian involvement in the global war on terror. The issue will always be that the Liberal government has not done enough to protect Canada's interests, has even sold out to the U.S. at times, and as a consequence the best thing for Quebecers is to be free to manage their own affairs. "We can't trust the Liberals" will be the key Bloc theme and the U.S. will, at times, play into it.

NDP -- NO CREEPING AMERICANIZATION

10. (C) Of all the parties, only the NDP has a position on the U.S. that is grounded in ideology and not politics. The NDP wants for Canada to be different, and is genuinely concerned with any policies or government that brings it too close to the U.S. business culture, health care system, and foreign policy. The NDP believes this position will appeal to a large number of Canadians. Specifically, it will campaign against the creeping Americanization of health care, Canadian participation in U.S.-style military operations in Afghanistan which causes it to stray from the country's roots as peacekeepers, and the sale of Canadian companies to U.S. financial interests. It will also continue to highlight the Liberal failure to do enough on softwood, although with a focus on helping labor, emphasizing that more should have been done to assist the industry with subsidies and compensation. One of Jack Layton's final statements in the last question period was "we are not going to simply sit by and twiddle our thumbs while we see this crisis unfold in our

industry." The NDP will run on the platform of being the un-Americans, rather than the anti-Americans.

11. (C) Comment: The anti-American or un-American thread is a constant one in Canada, the unfortunate reality that Trudeau described in 1969 when he said "living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast. . . one is affected by every twitch and grunt." There is an element of cognitive dissonance in this, however, as being anti-anything is very un-Canadian. So with very few exceptions, it is largely just rhetoric and we shouldn't take it too seriously. And compared to the last campaign, we seem to be in pretty good shape. It would appear that the appeal by Ambassador Wilkins and the Secretary to "tone down the Anti-American rhetoric" may have had an impact for a time, but we suggest that as the campaign heats up so will the "let's stand up to the U.S. message."

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WILKINS